



PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY

May 23, 2023

The Honorable James B. Eldridge
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on The Judiciary

The Honorable Michael S. Day
House Chair, Joint Committee on The Judiciary

Dear Chair Eldridge, Chair Day, and Committee members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of 60 members, providers and advocates of child and family services across the Commonwealth. Together we promote the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services that promote the safety, health, and well-being of children and families. Our members know first-hand the struggles faced by vulnerable people in the Commonwealth, including youth who are transitioning from the foster care and juvenile justice systems into adulthood.

On behalf of our members and the people they serve, we are writing today to testify in support of **"An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors"** (H.1597/S.983).

Approximately 60% of child sex trafficking victims have intersected with foster care or another part of the child welfare system. These youth are already at heightened risk of involvement with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems, just because of adult circumstances surrounding them. This bill provides victims of the sex trade services such as these youth with support and a path out, while holding accountable the buyers and others who profit from their vulnerability. The industry is based upon the sexual exploitation and oppression of vulnerable populations who we believe should be protected by police from the violence associated with buyers and exploiters. While most agree that children are exploited in this industry, it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of adults are not there by choice either or at least not real choice, as it is a path of last resort.

We have intentionally chosen to support "An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors" in contrast to other bills that consider full decriminalization as a model. Research shows that full decriminalization would drive demand and growth of the inherently exploitative sex trade market, ultimately keeping children at risk of victimization. The numbers provide scary foreshadowing: such as a likely 20% increase of men who would buy sex¹. Yet, 89% of adults in the

¹ Demand Abolition, *Who Buys Sex? Understanding and Disrupting Illicit Market Demand*, 4 (2018)



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sex industry want to get out if they could.² We can reasonably anticipate gaps in demand would be filled by the most marginalized in our communities, including through child trafficking.

For most survivors, the commercial sex industry is a place of profound violence, degradation and trauma. This bill, based on the Equality Model, moves Massachusetts towards better protecting and serving victims of the sex trade, as it has in Sweden, France, Canada, Israel, Ireland, Norway, and more. The benefits have included a decrease in violence and deaths among people in prostitution, a decrease in trafficking, and a decrease in the number of men buying sex.

We urge the Committee to report this bill favorably and work for its passage without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rachel Gwaltney".

Rachel Gwaltney
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts

² Farley, Melissa et al. 2003. "Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *Journal of Trauma Practice*, Vol. 2, No. 3/4: 33-74; and Farley, Melissa. ed. 2003. *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress*. Haworth Press, New York.